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ABSTRACT

Social scientists emphasize reading as one way of obtaining knowledge and skills together with other approaches such as visiting museums and observing purposeful items. Then too, they emphasize using a variety of approaches in helping students achieve worthwhile objectives in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. A quality social studies curriculum will emphasize balance among the social science disciplines of culture, history, geography, political science, and economics. Each has its own methods of inquiry; reading is one method of acquiring knowledge and skills in the social studies. If reading is being stressed, the question arises "How much stress should be placed upon word recognition and comprehension? If a student cannot identify a word while reading, the teacher must offer assistance. But the student might need more help to learn to comprehend what he/she is reading. To think critically and analyze, the student needs to be able to separate fact from opinion, accurate from inaccurate content, and reality from fantasy. And it is necessary for students to develop proficiency in problem solving. Once the problem is clearly stated, then reference materials must be used in data gathering. The following types of social studies reference materials should be available: books, primary documents, special references, reference aids, and miscellaneous materials. The teacher needs to be constantly on the lookout for new materials to be used in problem-solving activities. To appraise learner progress, the teacher may use standardized tests, criterion-referenced tests, and informal devices such as teacher-written tests, oral performance, or participatory activities. Contains 8 references. (NKA)

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# How Much Should Pupils Read in the Social Studies?

by Marlow Ediger

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M. Ediger

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## HOW MUCH SHOULD PUPILS READ IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES?

An important question to ask is, "How much should pupils read in the social studies curriculum?" Reading is a very salient way of learning in social studies units of study. The author, as a university supervisor of student teachers in the public schools, has observed classrooms where the entire social studies curriculum stressed reading in history, geography, and government or political science. No doubt, these pupils had ample opportunities to learn much subject matter. However, pupils have individual needs in terms of methods of learning. Not all, of course, are good readers and cannot benefit from the ongoing reading activities. The author has also observed classrooms in which almost no reading was stressed in the social studies. A strong hands on approach in learning was emphasized with a learning by doing procedure. The needs of individual children must be met with appropriate, developmental learning opportunities.

Social scientists do emphasize reading as a salient way of obtaining knowledge and skills together with other approaches such as visiting museums and observing purposeful items. Then too, they emphasize using a variety of approaches in helping pupils achieve worthwhile objectives in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ediger and Rao, 2001, Chapter Eleven).

### The Role of Reading in Teaching the Social Studies

A quality social studies curriculum will emphasize balance among the social science disciplines. Each has its own methods of inquiry; reading is one method of acquiring knowledge and skills in the social studies. Ten thematic themes have ben identified for pupil study and inquiry in the social studies:

1. culture as stressed in anthropology and sociology. Here, pupils learn about the human made part of the environment such as religious beliefs, language, art, music, and architecture as they meet human needs and affect human behavior.
2. history emphasizes pupils reconstructing the past, learning about change in terms of time, and the connection of the past with the present.
3. study of places and regions (geography) to include how the natural environment has changed due to human effort, geographical features and climate as they influence human beings, how regions are interconnected on the planet earth, and hospitable and inhospitable places of habitation.


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4. political science and how it affects human beings. Here, pupils learn about different forms of government; citizenship; laws, rules, and regulations; and changes made, over time, in the regulation of human behavior.

5. economics emphasizes selected concepts such as production, distribution, consumption, and gross national product (See National Council for the Social studies, 2001).

For each of the above named social science disciplines, there are a plethora of units which may be taught. Objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures must be in the offing for reach social studies unit of study. They need to emphasize a variety of activities and experiences for children. These should be on the understanding level of pupils and be developmental. If reading is being stressed, the question arises, "How much stress should be placed upon word recognition and comprehension?"

## Word Recognition Skills in the Social Studies

If a pupil cannot identify a word while reading , the teacher may give the following assistance:

1. use context clues to guide the pupil in word recognition. Provide five seconds of time, approximately, to permit the child to identify the unknown word, before context clues are used. Acceptable context clues should be meaningful and make sense within the sentence.

2. if this does not help, assist the pupil with identification of the initial consonant in the unknown word and its accompanying sound. Generally, this will be adequate in word recognition help together with the use of context clue use.

3. the teacher may wish to assist pupils to notice how an unknown word ends which might rhyme with a known word.

4. syllabication skills can be valuable for pupils to use. There are selected commonly used prefixes in unknown words, such as "un," which means "not." A child may know and be able to identify, for example, the following without the "un," prefix: common, able, do, becoming, and tidy. By removing the "un," from each of these words, such as in "uncommon," the child is able to recognize the formerly unknown word. This can be observed among children struggling to identify unknown words.

5. there are unrecognized words that appear to be new and lengthy. These may have common suffixes such as in the following: worthless, penniless, homeless, and jobless. For example, the base or root word may be familiar to the pupil, such

as in "worth." The suffix "less" might also be familiar reading and putting the root word and the suffix together, the initial lengthy unknown word "as worthless" is now a familiar word in the reading vocabulary (Ediger, 2001, ERIC # ED 458270).

## Comprehension in the Social Studies

Hopefully in reading in the social studies, the pupil will need minimal assistance in word recgnition so that higher levels of thinking may be taught in an academic area. If a pupil is a word caller and does not understand what has been read, he/she will need help in concentrating and telling about that which has been read. By reflecting upon subject matter read, the child will attend carefully to subject matter encountered. At first, the child may read information and comprehend facts only or largely. Here, the pupil needs to do something with the factual content. The learner might then need guidance to tell what has been read in his/her own words. After being able to do this, the pupil should tell in his/her own words how to use what has been read. If directions in working on a construction project are being read, the pupil needs to not only be able to attach meaning to the given directions but also to use the information to do an activity correctly.

Critical thinking is more complex for most pupils. Here, the pupil needs to analyze subject matter read. To analyze, the learner needs to be ale to separate fact from opinion, accurate from inaccurate content, and reality from fantasy. This can be done on a developmental level in any grade. The teacher needs to observe each child carefully to notice what is and is not possible in reading achievement in the social studies (Ediger, 1979, 1, 3). Creative thinking needs a synthesis of subject matter read. The right brain hemisphere is generally used when unique, novel ideas are being constructed. A wholeness results by using ideas known presently and achieving a newness or originality in content. Creativity resides within the individual. In addition to critical and creative thinking. Problem solving is also a very worthy end for pupils to develop proficiency in its use. Critical and creative thinking, no doubt, are inherent in problem solving experiences. Thus, the learner needs to analyze content to make certain it fits in as possible solutions to the problem to be solved. Then too, novel, unique ideas are necessary as solutions, due to the "tried and true" not working in many cases. Problem solving takes time and deliberation. Using "tried and true" ideas is rote learning and not problem solving. Problems identified are those for which ready made solutions are not

there, but need finding through the use of a variety of reference sources. Each problem is salient to be solved and is clearly defined so that data sources might be used to locate the needed information as a solution. Thus, in problem solving, pupils first need to select a salient problem (Ediger, ERIC # 458566).

Once, the problem is clearly stated, then reference materials must be used in data gathering. The following types of social studies reference materials should be available:

Books --- textbooks, supplementary books, picture books, historical fiction.

Primary documents ---- letters, diaries, journals, recordings, speeches, photos, posters, newspapers, police records, funerals records, editorials, and essays (anything created at the time being studied).

Special references (paper and electronic) --- encyclopedias, maps and globes, online museums (the Smithsonian) and library ( the Library of Congress), atlases, dictionaries, world almanacs, charts and graphs, constitution of the United Sates, Yearbooks, legislative manuals, internet, C- SPAN, Channel One, CNN.

Reference Aids (paper and electronic), --- card catalog, The Reader's Guide, bibliographies, COMCATS.

Miscellaneous materials ---advertisements, magazines and periodicals, city and telephone directories, labels, guidebooks and tour books, letters, diaries, journals, travel folders, postcards, newspapers and news clippings, comic books, pictures, schedules and timetables, pamphlets and booklets (such as those from the information services of foreign countries, superintendent of documents, conservation departments, historical societies, and art galleries), weather reports, manufactures' guarantees and warranties, money, checks, coupons for premiums, receipts, reviews, and government documents (Parker, 2001).

The teacher needs to be on the lookout continuously for new materials to be used in problem solving activities. Diverse materials are needed on different topics and on various reading levels to provide adequately for the needs of each pupil. To motivate pupils to read library books, the teacher should

1. use exciting quality literature.
2. stress stimulating, coordinated reading and composition activities.
3. implement interesting strategies of instruction.
4. decrease drill activities and use more of critical and creative thinking experiences, as well as problem solving.
5. expose children to varied forms of literature -- story

telling, dramatization, discussions of books, and choric reading

6. emphasize many ways of pupils sharing what has been read.

7. show enthusiasm for reading subject matter

8. stress a variety of approaches to use when pupils reveal what has been learned.

9. help pupils build background information for reading a given selection.

10. use a variety of learning activities such as art, discussion, experiments, demonstrations, sharing, construction, listening, dramatic, processing, as well as virtual and actual field trips (See Tiedt, 1983, Chapter Twelve).

## Evaluation of Achievement

There are a plethora of approaches available to appraise learner progress. Standardized tests which are norm referenced and make comparisons among pupils may be used. These tend not to have accompanying objectives for teachers to use as benchmarks of instruction. Criterion referenced tests have objectives for teachers to use as guidelines in teaching. They are developed on the premise that all pupils can reach and achieve the accompanying objectives, usually written in measurable terms. Informal devices developed by classroom teachers to evaluate pupil achievement include teacher written tests (multiple choice, true/false, essay, short answer, matching items, rating scales, and checklists).

The use of performance standards is relatively new on the evaluation platform. Performance standards are statements of achieving content standards. They specify "how good is good enough." Students can demonstrate their achievement of content standards in various ways, such as:

* written performances including short answer, multiple choice, and essay examinations; research papers
* oral performances, including oral reports, participation in simulated public hearings, mock trial and appellate court proceedings, panel discussions, and debates
* participatory activities, including serving as participant/leader in committee meetings, panel discussions, student government, student courts, and civic organizations.
* visual and auditory presentations, including charts, graphs, diagrams, models, portfolios, video and audio tapes.

Regardless of the means (e. g., written essay, oral presentation) chosen to demonstrate a content standard, student responses should give evidence that they have

understood major concepts, know relevant historical and contemporary conditions and developments, and where applicable, can use what they have learned to evaluate, take, and defend positions on current issues.

The performance standard which follows is presented to illustrate what performance standards are and how they relate to content standards. These performance standards will specify appropriate levels of increasingly sophisticated student responses, each building on the previous response. For example, in the following illustrate performance standard from grades 9- 12, the

* basic level provides criteria to determine if students can explain the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government, and identify at least one historical and contemporary example of such governments
* proficient level provides criteria to determine if, in addition to satisfying the basic level, students can explain the differences between such forms of limited governments as constitutional democracies and such forms of unlimited governments as authoritarian and totalitarian systems.
* advanced level provides criteria to determine if, in addition to satisfying criteria for the basic and proficient levels, students can demonstrate a deeper understanding of the characteristics of these types of governments including, for example, the role of civli society in limited and unlimited governments and the role of ideology in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes (National Standards for Civics and Government, as quoted in 1996 Yearbook, 90).

How should pupil achievement results be used, be it from testing or non-testing sources? The following recommendations appear plausible:

1. to notice what has been learned by the pupil and to assist learners to achieve that which was incorrect.
2. to notice what is of interest to pupils so that the curriculum might incorporate more of learner interests.
3. to notice achievement as related to the pupil's personal learning style.
4. to notice which intelligence a pupil does best in when responding to performance criteria in the evaluation process.
5. to notice improved ways in providing for individual differences.

Assessment should be done in terms of objectives for the unit or course. This is to emphasize the concept of <u>validity</u> in the

assessment process. Thus, what is assessed has been taught or covered n the ongoing learning opportunities. Consistency of results should be in the offing when assessing pupil achievement. The concept of reliability is then being stressed, be it test/retest, split half, and/or alternate forms reliability. Performance criteria should possess clarity in the mind of the learner. Thus, clearly written test items are in the assessment program. Assessment to notice if pupils have achieved objectives is the purpose of evaluation and the results should be used to improve the curriculum.

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